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NOTE FOR: Deputy Director of Central
Intelligence

FROM : Acting Deputy Director for
Intelligence

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be "R. Kerr", written over the typed name.

You asked about a look at Soviet reactions to the NSDD. Attached is a typescript that was done a little over a month ago as an input to the NSDD process. Some of the discussion relates directly to the options for US action discussed in the draft directive. We have also developed several other typescripts on the same general subject. I have attached a couple of these. It is not obvious to me what else we can do now. Tell me if you have any ideas.



Richard J. Kerr

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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

23 May 1984

SOVIET REACTION TO US MILITARY INTERVENTION IN THE PERSIAN GULF

Summary

Moscow's ability to project sizeable military force in the Persian Gulf region is severely constrained by the limited range of its fighter aircraft and its lack of the types of ships necessary to comprise a carrier task force. Moreover, the Soviets recognize that the West has regional military superiority and have acknowledged that the West has a legitimate interest in the free flow of oil out of the Persian Gulf. Consequently, so long as Western efforts to protect shipping in the Gulf do not include the occupation of Iranian ports and airfields, Moscow's response is likely to be confined to propaganda barrages, attempts to gain UN condemnation of the US action and efforts to capitalize by improving relations with Tehran. If the US should land forces on Iranian territory there is at least an even chance the Soviets would invoke the 1921 Friendship Treaty to move forces into northwest Iran.

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Military Capabilities

1. Moscow would have few military options available with which to respond to Western clashes with Iranian aircraft or attacks on Iranian airfields and ports. Soviet fighters and fighter-bombers could not reach Persian Gulf targets even from existing airbases in Afghanistan. The SU-24 Fencer, a longer-range light bomber, could reach Persian Gulf targets if based in Afghanistan but would be operating at the extreme limits of its combat radius in a mission that must anticipate opposition. Backfire and TU-16 Badger bombers have sufficient range to reach the Gulf but would be highly

This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] the Third World Division, Office of Soviet Analysis in response to a request from the DDI. It was coordinated with the Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis. Comments and queries are welcome and may be addressed to the Chief, Middle East/Africa/Latin America Branch, Third World Division, SOVA [redacted]

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vulnerable to US carrier-based aircraft. Only with access to airfields in Iran or Iraq could the Soviets mount effective air operations over the Gulf.

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2. Iran, Turkey or Iraq are unlikely to grant the USSR overflight clearances. We cannot rule out, however, Tehran granting overflight rights and even access to airfields for refueling if it concluded that such a move was the only way to deter the US. The Iraqis might also welcome a Soviet role if they calculated that increased superpower involvement and the ensuing risk of confrontation would hasten an end to the war, but the Soviets would still need overflight clearance from Turkey. Even if clearances were obtained, or the Soviets decided to go ahead without them, getting aircraft to the Gulf would be difficult.

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3. The Soviet naval presence in the region is at a low level.

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4. The Indian Ocean Squadron could be augmented within about 10 days by ships from the Mediterranean Squadron and within 12 to 18 days by ships from the Pacific Fleet. Whatever naval forces Moscow is likely to send to the region, however, would be no match for the US, French and British ships currently there. In the absence of supporting airforces, Soviet surface ships would be vulnerable to US air attacks.

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5. There are sizable Soviet forces opposite Iran. In addition to the equivalent of six divisions in Afghanistan, the Soviets have 24 divisions--only five of which are maintained at full strength--in the three military districts north of Iran. A full-scale invasion of Iran would require some 20 Soviet divisions and at least a month of preparation. Alternatively, an invasion with a limited objective such as the northwestern Iranian province of Azarbayjan could be launched by about five to seven divisions after two to three weeks of preparation.

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Moscow's Political Outlook

6. In a 1980 speech, Brezhnev acknowledged the West had a vital stake in protecting the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf. Recently, low-level Soviet officials have suggested to US representatives that the Soviets would not intervene if a Western incursion was limited to ensuring the safety of shipping in the Gulf. [REDACTED]

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7. At the same time, Moscow will want to avoid an appearance of being powerless to influence events in the Gulf, particularly in view of what it perceives as a more aggressive US posture around the world. Its options, however, are confined largely to providing material aid and pressuring other countries in the area. The Soviets also would view US actions to protect Gulf oil shipments as presenting the opportunity for long-term gains in Soviet influence with Iran. [REDACTED]

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Reaction to Different Levels of Escalation

8. The Soviets would use any US military moves to protect Gulf shipping to castigate Washington--portraying it as using current tensions as a pretext to increase its military pressure in the region--and to improve relations with Tehran. Moscow's propaganda campaign would probably take the form of TASS statements similar to the one issued in March, which denounced US naval activity in the Gulf as a "gross violation" of international law that could provoke a "conflict situation" for which the US would have to bear full responsibility. The Soviets could then issue a more authoritative government statement that would stress Soviet interests in the region and bring the issue to the UN Security Council. Moscow would be careful, however, not to commit itself to any specific course of action. The Soviets also might use the opportunity to revive the Brezhnev proposal of December 1980 for an international conference on Gulf security in hopes that they might win greater Western and regional recognition of their interests in the Gulf. [REDACTED]

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9. Militarily, the Soviets would respond to Western moves to protect Gulf shipping by increasing their intelligence-gathering efforts and augmenting their limited naval forces in the region. [REDACTED]

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10. If the US mounted air and naval attacks on Iranian ports and airfields, Moscow would be likely to step up air defense activity in its military districts bordering Iran. It might even maneuver some ground forces in those districts and call up reservists as a signal to the US of Soviet concern. [REDACTED]

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11. If US forces seized Iranian ports or airfields, the Soviets probably would step up their military activity and openly threaten to intervene into

northern Iran. They would point to the 1921 Soviet-Iranian treaty--that Iran has unilaterally abrogated--which gives the USSR the right to introduce forces into Iran if a third party intervenes militarily. We believe, however, that if the US made it clear that its occupation of Iranian territory was limited and temporary, the chances would be less than even that the Soviets would intervene into northern Iran. The likelihood of Soviet intervention would increase markedly if Moscow was convinced that the US planned a permanent military presence in Iran or was seeking to replace the present regime with a pro-Western government. [REDACTED]

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12. The proximity of Soviet ground forces to Iran makes it unlikely that Moscow would feel compelled to create tensions with the US in another part of the world as a response to Western intervention in Iran, but this cannot be ruled out. The travel restrictions recently imposed on allied military liaison missions in East Germany already reflect Moscow's willingness to raise the level of tensions in areas of long-standing sensitivity. On the other hand, any Soviet effort to create tension in some other area will cause problems not only with the US but with key West European states, as well, and would shift attention away from the Gulf. Nonetheless, Soviet propaganda will insinuate that the United States is vulnerable to challenges in some other areas where Moscow believes it would be at less of a military disadvantage. [REDACTED]

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The Longer-Run

13. Although Moscow apparently does not want to see the Gulf conflict escalate, it would be certain to attempt to use the opportunity of Western intervention against Iran in order to improve its own standing in Tehran. The Soviets would try to pose as Iran's protector and convince Tehran of its need for a closer military relationship with the USSR, especially in the area of air defense. Moscow's overtures, however, are unlikely to overcome basic Soviet-Iranian differences over the long term. The Soviets would also have to tread carefully in order not to antagonize Iraq. If possible, Moscow might again try its hand at mediation much as it did in the Indo-Pakistani war in 1965 or organize regional negotiations that would include Soviet participation. [REDACTED]

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